Lights try to tame Dawgs
By George Ferguson
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When two teams are in desperate search of a win, games usually turn out to be very exciting. In the case of the Montana State University-Northern Lights and UM-Western Bulldogs, both teams are in a little bit of desperation mode.

Saturday afternoon in Dillon, one team will get that much-needed second win of the season when the Lights (1-2, 0-2) and Bulldogs (1-3, 1-2) tangle at Vigilante Field. Kickoff is set for 2 p.m.

Northern comes into Saturday’s game having lost to No. 5 Rocky Mountain College 32-18 last weekend in Havre. Meanwhile, Western suffered a stunning 38-35 loss at College of Idaho last Saturday. It was C of I’s first-ever Frontier Conference game, and in front of 5,000 fans in Caldwell, Idaho, the Yotes kicked a game-winning field goal with seven minutes left to hand Western its third straight loss.

Still, instead of seeing the Bulldogs as a team which is reeling right now, Northern interim head coach Jake Eldridge sees a talented opponent, playing at home, hungry for a win.

"Western is a very good football team," Eldridge said. "One thing B.J. (Robertson) has got them doing is, they play with a lot of emotion and enthusiasm. They really are a fired-up football team, and they get after you. And they'll have the home crowd and when you play with that kind of emotion, it's usually a recipe for success. So we have to go in there understanding that we have to take care of our own business. We have to play one play at a time, play hard for 60 minutes and not get caught up in all that emotion."

On both sides of the ball, the Lights have to be sharp, too, because Western is a quality football program. The Bulldogs are led on offense by sophomore running back Sam Rutherford and quarterback Tyler Hulse. Rutherford has rushed for nearly 300 yards this season, while Hulse has quietly put together an efficient start to the 2014 campaign. Add in junior running back Dylan Kramer, and a veteran offensive line, and the Bulldogs are very similar to Northern in that they want to hurt teams with the run game.

Defensively, Western is also similar to the Lights. The Bulldogs are a physical and fast defense, led by defensive back Jesse McCloud and linebackers A.J. Wilson and Joe Coker. Defensive end Phil Selin is an excellent pass rusher, while the UM-W defense allows just 101 yards rushing per contest.

"The thing that stands out to me the most is, they're a very physical football team," Eldridge noted. "They really get after it on both sides of the ball. Defensively, they very physical and they have a really good secondary that gets after it and makes plays. But they are physical on offense, too. That offensive line pushes people around. So this is going to be a very physical football game and we have to be ready for that."

The Lights can certainly be physical, too. In a game that features two stout running backs for Western, Northern will counter with the No. 1 rush defense in the Frontier. The Lights allow just 98 rushing yards per game, while as a whole, MSU-N is allowing less than 400 yards of total offense, which is second in the
Frontier. Tyler Craig also leads the league with five sacks thus far, while the entire MSU-N defensive line has played well, and we'll have to do so again Saturday.

Offensively, Northern is playing well, with Zach McKinley leading the league at 141 rushing yards per contest. Trevor Baum leads the conference in receiving, and MSU-N's weapons have produced for quarterback Travis Dean. So, Northern certainly has the offensive firepower to go to Dillon and be successful.

However, as good as both the defense and offense has played thus far, mistakes, particularly on special teams, but not only special teams have hurt the Lights in their 0-2 start to league play. And Eldridge says in order to win in Dillon, his team must put a complete game together.

"I think that's the one frustrating thing, we haven't put a consistent football game together yet," Eldridge said. "In order to win football games, you have to be consistent, and we haven't done that in all three phases yet. We have just shot ourselves in the foot too many times, whether it be last week's turnovers, or giving up the kickoff return, or a penalty at the wrong time. In this league, you just can't keep doing those things and expect to win. The league is too good, and teams will make you pay for those mistakes.

"The great thing is our guys understand that," he continued. "They know what they need to do and they're working really hard to correct those things. So what we're looking for this week is to go out and play hard like always, but also to play consistent in all three phases. If we do those things, and do what we're supposed to do, I believe we have a chance to win every single game we play, including this one."

Saturday's game between the Lights and Bulldogs will kick off at 2 p.m. in Dillon. Northern returns home to host No. 9 Southern Oregon Sept. 27, while Western will have a bye next week.

**Road Test**

**MSU-Northern Lights** (1-2, 0-2) at **UM-Western Bulldogs** (1-3, 1-2)

**Saturday 2 p.m. in Dillon**

**Streaming:** http://www.msun.edu/athletics

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